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## Baltimore Sun Op Ed

### Container transfer facility key to Md. economy

#### Public will have opportunity for input in site selection

By Beverley K. Swaim-Staley

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Located in the heart of the Mid-Atlantic region, Maryland plays a vital role in moving freight throughout the Eastern seaboard and the Midwest. Each year, the business of moving freight by rail in Maryland supports 1,600 local jobs and generates more than \$110 million in wages. However, the freight business is changing, and it is important that Maryland keep pace. The most dynamic change is toward "double-stacking," where two cargo containers, stacked one on top of the other, are placed on a single rail car for shipment over long distances. The movement to double-stack requires a higher clearance for overhead structures, and that is where Maryland needs to improve its infrastructure to meet current and future demands in order to remain a strong economic competitor with other states.

This is particularly true for the Port of Baltimore which must now compete for cargo with other ports offering the double-stack rail access that steamship lines seek. Working with CSX Transportation, Maryland is exploring the potential of creating an intermodal transfer facility south of Baltimore City. An intermodal facility is where containers are interchanged between trucks and trains to maximize efficiency. By placing this facility south of Baltimore, CSX will ultimately be able to move double-stack containers along its rail network to and from Midwestern markets, creating real economic advantages for the region.

Without such a facility, our economic landscape would change dramatically. Existing businesses will be cut off from national and international customers. New business and jobs will simply avoid coming to Maryland. In the end, Maryland residents would pay more at the cash register as the cost of consumer products climbed.

The intermodal transfer facility will be an important part of the National Gateway project in Maryland. The National Gateway Initiative is a public-private partnership among the federal government, six states, the District of Columbia and CSX to jointly fund height clearance and related-rail projects which will create a double-stack freight network, connecting East Coast and Midwest markets. It will help deliver more than \$2 billion in public benefits to Maryland and the Baltimore region, including \$450 million in reduced logistics costs for shippers; \$87 million in savings from reduced wear and tear on highways; \$121 million in savings from fewer highway accidents; and \$50 million in savings from reduced congestion.

As Maryland and its local communities continue their effort to protect their natural resources and environment, this facility can be an important step toward limiting the use of fossil fuels — decreasing CO2 emissions by 2.5 million tons.

As a small and compact state, Maryland's strength has always been the vastness of its connections not the vastness of its land. Today, the challenge is to continue to make those connections while being sensitive to our vital communities.

CSX has embarked on an effort to identify candidate sites for a new intermodal facility with the assistance of the Maryland Department of Transportation. Both organizations are committed to an open, rigorous and transparent process where multiple alternatives will be evaluated with no preference for one site over another. This process will be governed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a federal law that requires extensive study of and public comment on a wide variety of issues. These include environmental and economic impacts, as well as impacts on neighboring communities.

Throughout this process, residents and businesses in communities located near the candidate sites will have multiple opportunities to obtain information on the proposals, offer ideas, comment and voice any objections they may have. Community participation is welcome and encouraged throughout this study process as citizen feedback will play a vital role in identifying the best alternative for an initiative that is so important to the future of Maryland's economy.

To date, four candidate locations have been identified along the I-95 corridor in Anne Arundel, Howard and Prince George's counties. A dozen sites were evaluated initially and measured against five basic criteria that are necessary for such a facility in this region. The site must be south of the Howard Street tunnel that does not provide the necessary clearance for double-stack, contain at least 70 contiguous acres of usable land, be able to accommodate the rectangular shape necessary for intermodal operations, be within close proximity to a major highway and be located adjacent to the CSX mainline (Camden Line). Four candidate sites met this "first cut" criteria. Now, those four sites will undergo rigorous study and evaluation under the federal NEPA process.

Throughout this process, the Maryland Department of Transportation and CSX will maintain open lines of communication to keep communities and interested stakeholders informed of its progress. Citizens are urged to play an active role as the process moves forward. Workshops are being held in communities near the candidate sites and formal public hearings will be held as the NEPA process moves forward. For information on the workshops and to follow the evaluation process, visit <http://www.intermodal.maryland.gov>. By working together, considering all the facts and developing solutions, Marylanders can meet the challenge of identifying an appropriate site for this intermodal facility that means jobs and a stronger economy for our state.

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